"Somewhere East of Suez"

Dr. Reinsch's Narrative

AN AMERICAN DIPLOMAT IN CHINA. By Paul S. Reinsch. Doubleday, Page & Co.

In Dr. Reinsch's narrative of his experiences while serving as American Minister to China in the six years from 1913 to 1919 we have in one volume a political history of that period and a fascinating travel book. To the student of world politics and of America's foreign relations the volume will have a special appeal, while to the general reader, the man or woman who makes his journeys chiefly in the pages of books, this story of "An American Diplomat in China" will prove to be the most delightful and entertaining work since Dr. Ross published "The Changing Chinese."

Out of the involved coil of Chinese internal politics and its international affairs that Dr. Reinsch untangles and sets down into a smoothly consecutive record two leading elements emerge. These are the never ceasing efforts of Japan to gain control of the destinies of her big neighbor and the non-political attitude of the United States toward the new Oriental Republic, an attitude that generally resulted in Japan getting rather the worst of it in her attempts to pick this or that crumb off the Chinese table. In Dr. Reinsch's time in China our Government's attitude was to let our bankers, business interests or the American Red Cross do the actual work of helping China. Yet at the same time the Government would give no actual support to any of these forces, rather hampering them by its cool indifference. It is the opinion of this author that American prestige and advancement in China suffers through the parochial attitude of American bankers and their lack of ability to engage in and carry through large enterprises in foreign lands as do the British bankers in particular. But our bankers may retort to this, and with excellent grounds for their opinion, that it would not appear a very wise thing for them to go into a foreign country and make investments of millions when their own Government will not back them up.

This is quaking earth, however, over which the general reader will tread, and as a rather remote spectator. Also will he find Chinese politics as troublesome as his own and even more impossible of solution. What he will take most pleasure in is Dr. Reinsch's descriptions of the legation life in Pekin, the picturesque and colorful descriptions of that city itself and of some nearby places and of the life of the Chinese and the Americans residing in the Chinese capital.

The political opinions of President Yuan Shih-kai are not so interesting, for example, as to learn that for his allegiance to the cause of the republic the Prince of the Koersin Banner was "allowed to ride in a yellow canopied carriage" as a mark of the appreciation of the President. How much more picturesque than to have a "job" handed out to the Prince, as would be our political fashion of giving a reward for faithful services to the "party." And how naive it appears to us that the Empress Dowager, who had a passionate admiration for automobiles and had bought a fleet of them was never allowed to ride in one because the committee on ceremonies had never been able to overcome the difficulty of the chauffeur being seated in the same vehicle as the Empress.

Dr. Reinsch comments on this that until some way has been found of having a chauffeur drive kneeling it was impossible for the Dowager Empress to gratify her desire to take a ride in one of the swiftly moving machines. That our own affairs are not without their humors is shown by Dr. Reinsch's description of the legation compound, in which many of the buildings had been erected by a Government architect sent to China expressly for that purpose, "and the somewhat stereotyped chancery and houses of secretaries were popularly called 'the young post offices.'"

A unique experience is the description of the writer's pilgrimage to the sacred mountain, Taishan, one of the Confucian shrines that is 6,000 feet high, and up and down which the visitors are carried in chairs by bearers. The antiquity of the place and of its memories are well illustrated in Dr. Reinsch's story of asking if the method of transportation was not dangerous for the bearers. He was told, "Yes, but the last time any one has fallen was about 400 years ago." On visiting the Holy Duke, who presides over the town of Chufu, the home of Confucius, Dr. Reinsch and his party went through the cemetery, "the burial ground of the Confucius family for at least 3,000 years, antedating Confucius himself." On calling on the Duchess the party found her to be "particularly fond of cats, of which at least forty were playing about her."

Of the Americans residing temporarily in Pekin the book gives this sketch of W. F. Carey of the great railway building firm, who went there in 1915 with a large staff of assistants and their families. "Mr. Carey had won his way from the ranks, and his Irish originality had not been befogged by theoretical discussions. He immediately felt at home with the frank and human Chinese and constantly had many of them at his house, where they partook of true American hospitality and shared in frolics of dancing and poker. The Chinese are fond of this game, in which human nature plays so large a part; the impassiveness of their countenance lends itself admirably to the tactics of poker. It was amusing to hear Liang Shih-yi, who otherwise spoke not a word of English, enunciate from behind a pile of chips in staccato tones: 'Full house,' 'Two pair.' This eminent financier was a worthy match for any poker expert. Mr. Carey abbreviated many Chinese names, thus making them far more pronounceable. Mr. Chen Pan-ping, the Minister of Agriculture, thus became Ping-pong; the Secretary of State, Hsu Shih-chang, was Susie."

In his final summing up of the relations of America and China Dr. Reinsch writes: "Never has one nation had a greater opportunity to act as counselor and friend to another and to help a vast and lovable people to realize its striving for a better life. Cooperation freely sought, unconstrained, spontaneous desire to model on institutions and methods which are admired—that is the only way in which nations may mutually influence each other without the coercion of political power and the cunning of intrigue. That is the feeling which has existed in the hearts of the Chinese toward America. The American people do not yet realize what a treasure they possess in this confidence."

China Past and Present

THE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF CHINA. By Mabel Ping-Hua Lee. Being Volume XCIX. Number 1, of Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law. Edited by the Faculty of Political Science of Columbia University. Longmans, Green & Co.

As early as the third century B. C., Mencius, a Chinese philosopher, is credited with interpreting the responsibility of a Government to its people like this: "When men die of famine, you say it is the season that is to blame. What does this differ from saying, when you have caused a man's death, 'It was not I, but the weapon'?" It would seem, therefore, that then, as now, the economic concern of China was her food supply; and because of her centuries of peculiar segregation the index of China's economic history is really to be found in her agricultural progress.

Realizing this, Dr. Mabel Ping-Hua Lee gives us an altogether remarkable study of agriculture in this thorough and extensive survey of "The Economic History of China." Dr. Lee tells us that her study is purely "inductive." She had no preconceived ideas. But Dr. Lee was greatly impressed with the fact that the question of soil depletion in China presented a striking contrast to that which has obtained in the history of other civilizations which have flourished and decayed. China is the oldest nation in the world. The Chinese have been farmers for over forty centuries. Yet farm land in China is still known to be the most productive in the world. China's population to-day is almost 500,000,000, and her people now, as in ancient times, are "chiefly maintained upon the products of an area smaller than the improved farm lands of the United States." It was this fact, so at variance with history, that prompted Dr. Lee to undertake her research. And then, having the interests of her country at heart, Dr. Lee endeavored to concentrate her study in such a way that China's economic problems, in the light of history, might be thoroughly understood and solved.

It should promptly be said for Dr. Lee that her exhaustive research does not commence with Mencius and the third century before Christ. Indeed, we find ourselves learning that twenty-eight centuries before Christ the Chinese were taught to farm crudely, though apparently satisfactorily, by a beneficent ruler whose very name, Shonnung, signified "divine farmer." We learn, also, that such an extraordinarily feasible system of land tenure and distribution as that which is known as the Tsing Tien System had its beginning with the founding of the Chinese Empire in 2698 B. C.

This system was gradually developed and elaborated. It reached its culmination some sixteen centuries later. We then find that land was distributed according to its quality, and with due regard to the size of the family; moreover, that the tax levied was proportionate to the fertility of the soil. Practically all the people of China were then farmers. Great dignity attached to the occupation. "The Emperor was a cultivator himself." In January of each year he published notices of "expert advice to his people based upon his own experience." Every one had to work more or less on farms and was part of the Tsing Tien System, which in its administration became a sort of "feudal system."

Even then the empire recognized the fact that agriculture constituted its chief source of national wealth. There were regular officials for instructing the people in regard to the seasons and implements, cultivation and irrigation. There was one man whose duties consisted in differentiating the various soils and finding the crops best suited to each. Another had charge of irrigation, particularly as it pertained to rice crops. And it is interesting to observe that these early Chow rulers understood the details of irrigation as well as some phases of fertilization. Their legislation likewise shows that they certainly had a definite appreciation of the more far-reaching results of soil depletion.

In this connection Dr. Lee calls attention to the fact that, while their vigorous administration brought about an extraordinary degree of agricultural prosperity, the idea might also be advanced that the land, whose yield had been taxed to its utmost for almost two thousand years, was in a condition to warrant such rigorous legislation. And, as we read further, history would seem to substantiate Dr. Lee's idea. For directly we find the masses suffering hardship through famine, idleness and high prices of grain. Farmers were unable to eke a living out of the soil. For the first time in Chinese history we hear of "wanderers"—those who through inability to feed their families were forced to desert their fields, the farms which had been their homes and the homes of their ancestors for generations. The Tsing Tien System, in force for over twenty-three centuries, had to be abolished, because it was no longer adequate to meet conditions. Land was bought and sold.

In the latter half of the tenth century many attempts were made to restore good government. A modified Tsing Tien System was adopted, but the condition of the soil was such as to render it unworkable. Farm implements were distributed gratis, and agricultural experts again appointed. Governmental loans were made to the farms twice a year, for the summer crop and for the autumn crop, at the "moderate" rate of 40 per cent. (An edict had been issued to prohibit the exaction of an interest rate of over 100 per cent!) Education, too, was extended, and the arts and literature flourished. But the only direct results on the economic condition of China were an increase of population and more cultivated areas. The real condition of the farmers remained desperate. Crops failed. And again, through this soil depletion, there came an economic crisis with which the Government was unable to cope.

Modern China begins with the establishment of the Manchu Government in 1644. Curiously, we find again that foreign domination was not inimical to the welfare of the Chinese. For some hundred and fifty years the people enjoyed comparative contentment and prosperity. The government administration was surprisingly liberal. The Manchus became interested in manufacturing and commerce. There was development of literature and scientific knowledge. And again the population increased enormously, literally by millions. So that, despite unusual prosperity, severe famines occurred, with a resultant smoldering discontent among the people. Once more, for almost a century, we find China fairly seething with sporadic riots and uprisings.

In 1911 the Chinese succeeded in driving the Manchus from the throne and setting up a republic. Dr. Lee tells us, however, that the "welfare of the masses certainly has not improved." The farmers lead a hand-to-mouth existence which finds them unprepared for flood, or drought, or even a poor harvest. In 1921 there was a drought in five provinces affecting 30,000,000 people. Dr. Lee remarks upon the fact that the "death toll of the world war was 17,000,000, but the number doomed to die of starvation in China this year (1921) may be 15,000,000." All the millions sent to China in the shape of relief funds are inadequate. For clearly such assistance is purely palliative. Dr. Lee expounds to some length and good purpose on soil depletion, and tells us that China "must adopt and enforce a vigorous policy of agricultural restoration." Farmers must be instructed and assisted. "Mineral fertilizers and improved methods of culture must be introduced," so that, in addition to increased productivity, the soil will be improved to such capacity that China may become "self-sustaining." Natural calamities to which China is subject, like droughts and floods, cannot be controlled. But Dr. Lee points out that "irrigation works can be improved and rivers deepened and dykes built on the banks of the Yellow River ('China's Sorrow') so that its annual overflow may be checked." And more railroads must be built. Finally, China must develop her manufacturing and mines. "Let our industries be diversified, remembering that an exclusively agricultural country will always be a poor country." Even then there will remain the great problem of overpopulation.

The Varying Orient

ASIA AT THE CROSSROADS. By E. Alexander Powell. The Century Company.

THE OUTLOOK FOR THE PHILIPPINES. By Charles Edward Russell. The Century Company.

There is a general consensus of opinion among competent observers that Asia as a whole, and China in particular, is teetering on the edge of a perfectly discernible brink; but it is not at all clear whether she is about to hop over, or whether, if she does, one can at all predict what she may find upon landing on the other side. For many years we have been taught to believe the immemorial East unchanging, essentially static, immovable, and even if superficially ruffled still always the same. But lately an impression is gaining ground that this once immovable mass is actually getting ready to move, and it becomes intensely important to guess, if possible, whither it may be going. In particular, it cannot be doubted that China, if she chooses, can alter the future course of events so radically as to bring about worldwide changes. It is not the power to do so that is lacking so much as the collective will to action. A genuinely united, thoroughly modernized China is obviously invincible, from any standpoint, either material or spiritual.

It is, therefore, well to learn all we can about this changing East. Mr. Powell renders a good service in his book by taking up the matter in a somewhat elementary way. As he says in his preface, it is often assumed by writers upon the Orient that readers know more than they do about it. He is therefore careful to explain many things that will doubtless be familiar already to the special student. It was well worth doing, and Mr. Powell has done it with good discretion. There is, in fact, nothing very new or original in his presentation of the case, but it is a well made summary, and he comes right down to date.

He is, perhaps, inclined to be a little more pro-Japanese than some other recently vocal American critics, but his attitude remains sufficiently critical. His summary conclusion is that he does not believe that "fair minded Americans object to Japanese commercial expansion on the Asian mainland—so long as that expansion is legitimately conducted." Probably not, but that rather seems to avoid the precise issue. He adds, finally: "I can assure you Japan is genuinely, almost pathetically, anxious for American confidence and good will, and in order to attain them her responsible statesmen are prepared to make almost every concession that self-respect will permit and that a fair minded American can demand." Which is also a "safe" statement.

In Corea Mr. Powell sees "the Ireland of the East." No doubt there is an analogy, but it appears to be capable of being overdrawn—if not actually misleading. Mr. Powell gives a vivid, always interesting, sketch of the land and its people, containing a great deal of useful information, but his opinion of the Coreans on the whole is not overflattering. As to the present state of affairs he chooses a middle ground of opinion, neither condemning nor wholly approving Japanese control. He says:

"Criticism of Japan's stern militaristic policy and of the harsh methods she has permitted in its execution should not blind us to her integrity, her large administrative ability and to the energy she has displayed in carrying out material reforms. From personal observation on the spot I am convinced that the general condition of the Corean peasantry is appreciably higher than it ever was or could have been under Corean administration. This is not to be interpreted as meaning that I do not sympathize with the Coreans, for I do. They have been the victims of cruelty, injustice and oppression. But I can also sympathize with Japan. . . . She has jerked a nation out of the depths of poverty, degradation and despair as though by its collar, set it on its feet and is teaching it to 'play the game.'"

He also believes that Corea is far from being able to "go it alone," and would suffer if Japan were to let go.

His account of present conditions in China is also a useful summary of the prevailing confusion, the hostilities between north and south, the brigandage, the dangerous antics of the Tuchuns and the general uncertainty as to what next. He concludes that China would do well to take what she can get out of possible international readjustments without asking too much all at once. His general conclusion coincides with that of all recent critics, including the Chinese, that China must first reform herself if she is once more to become great. If she does clean up her own household there is no limit to her possibilities. But even if she does not, and if chaos continues, Mr. Powell still believes her unconquerable. "She will never be conquered," says he, "her people will never be assimilated by those of any other nation. . . . For when all is said . . . China is an anvil which, by mere passive resistance, will eventually wear out every hammer that beats upon it."

Passing to the Philippines he brings out clearly the vast complexity of the problems of mixed races there and concludes that any kind of "independence" is apparently still very much in the future.

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Mr. Russell's book is primarily a polemic in aid of Philippine independence, argued with his usual brilliance and skill and based upon his own recent observations during a tour throughout most of the islands, begun in 1920. It also contains much highly interesting description, a mass of information, documented and of his own discovery. As a story of travel and inspection it is eminently worth while, though one needs to remember that he is traveling with a purpose.

The effect of his argument will depend very much upon the reader's mental bias. It may carry conviction to the idealist or perfectionist, who is ready to believe that all things desirable are, therefore, also immediately possible. The more hard-headed will still require to be "shown" a good deal before they will agree with Mr. Russell's conclusions. The book remains, however, possibly the most vigorously efficient special pleading that has as yet been made for "turning the Philippines loose" to whatever fate might await them.